
STATE OF INDIANA

DISTRESSED UNIT APPEAL BOARD



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Distressed Unit Appeal Board Meeting Memorandum

December 13, 2018

Call to Order: A meeting of the Distressed Unit Appeals Board (“DUAB” or “Board”) was held on December 13, 2018, at 10:00 a.m. EDT at the Indiana Government Center South Building, Conference Room 18, Indianapolis, Indiana. Members of the Board attending the meeting in-person include Micah Vincent, Paul Joyce, Wes Bennett, Rebecca Kubacki and Representative Vernon Smith. Senator Eric Bassler attended by phone. Courtney Schaafsma, Executive Director, was also in attendance.

Chairman Vincent called the meeting to order and recognized compliance with the Open Door Law. Chairman Vincent presented the minutes for the October 10 and November 15 meetings. Ms. Kubacki made a motion that the Board approve the minutes. Mr. Joyce seconded. The Board voted 3-0-1 to approve the minutes, with Mr. Bennett abstaining.

Chairman Vincent then introduced the new emergency management lead for Gary Community School Corporation (“GCSC”), Dr. Pete Morikis. Dr. Morikis provided the Board with an update on his efforts over the past month, since the transition was announced on November 8. He explained that he had met with over 20 community and parent groups and encouraged people to provide feedback and suggestions. Dr. Morikis provided details on his visits to school buildings to meet with teachers and staff, including multiple visits to Bethune Early Childhood Development Center. He also explained that he had been meeting with local colleges and universities to build partnerships on academic offerings and teacher candidates.

Chairman Vincent asked about meetings with community leaders. Dr. Morikis indicated that he had met with the Mayor, other community leaders and had a number of phone calls with members of the Gary legislative delegation. Mr. Bennett asked what items were still on the list to accomplish and what were the two top challenges being faced in the first 90 days. Dr. Morikis indicated the top challenges were to engage the community and build their trust. He noted that he still planned to meet with clergy representatives and was just starting to dig deeper on curriculum and instruction considerations. He was also working to identify additional teachers to assist with class size concerns. Chairman Vincent asked about efforts that would be made to increase enrollment. Dr. Morikis noted that enrollment had continued to increase since count day, but that GCSC needed to continue to work toward providing a service that parents wanted to be a part of. Mr. Joyce asked how the increased enrollment impacted GCSC financially. Dr. Morikis indicated that GCSC does not receive additional funding for students that enroll after the count day but does incur additional costs associated with those students. Representative Smith indicated that he has been championing multiple count dates in the legislature, which would allow school corporations with high mobility to experience funding increases due to increased enrollment in a more timely manner.

Representative Smith then expressed that the community has been very receptive to Dr. Morikis and providing positive reviews. He noted that Dr. Morikis is taking time to assess the situation prior to developing plans and is listening to and building trust within the community.

Mr. Eric Parish, financial lead for the GCSC emergency management team, expressed that the team had adopted the acronym DARE 2020 for its focus – Deficit, Academics, Reset (including community and culture) and Enrollment. Initiatives are evaluated through this lens. He also noted that Dr. Morikis has had a positive impact on the team overall.

Ms. Kubacki asked how GCSC would balance the challenge of increasing enrollment when already experiencing large class sizes. Dr. Morikis indicated that the focus is on adding additional teachers now before the next enrollment push. Chairman Vincent also noted that increased enrollment would allow for additional revenue as well to fund more teachers. Representative Smith expressed that reductions in class sizes would help to motivate teachers and that keeping students in GCSC now would result in revenue in the long-run. Mr. Joyce noted that growth in enrollment is what would be key to long-run financial stability of the school district. Representative Smith noted that he heard Dr. Morikis acknowledge that he wanted to highlight positive things about GCSC and use them for marketing GCSC.

New business: Chairman Vincent thanked Representative Smith for her service on the Board, as his term on the Board was expiring as of December 31, 2018. Representative Smith expressed concern on behalf of the citizens of Gary over the role of Dr. Tony Bennett on the emergency management team for GCSC. Representative Smith then also passed out additional petition signatures opposing the potential closure of Bethune Early Childhood Development Center.

Adjournment: Chairman Vincent adjourned the meeting at 10:50 a.m.